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Brāhmanism. The *Brāhmaṇas* are almost entirely concerned with sacrifice. Indeed, the most orthodox school of Vedic theologians, the Mīmāṁsakas, go the length of maintaining that the sole aim of revelation is to teach the doctrine of sacrifice (*karman*). The Mīmāṁsakas are the representatives of the *Karma-mārga* ('way of works'), the doctrine which declares that the highest end of man is to be realized by works, *i.e.* by sacrifices and other observances taught in the Veda. Theirs is an extreme view which, however, fairly well presents the meaning of the *Brāhmaṇas* themselves, or, to be more accurate, of the greater part of every *Brāhmaṇa*. But this does not apply to the last chapters of, or appendixes to, some *Brāhmaṇas* called *Āraṇyakas*, or to certain independent treatises with similar contents, called *Upaniṣads*, which are the latest works of Vedic literature. For these texts contain philosophical speculations which for the most part are entirely unconnected with sacrifice; and on these texts another school of Vedic theologians, the Vedāntins, have based their theosophical systems. The Vedāntins are the oldest representatives of the *Jñāna-mārga* ('way of knowledge'), or the doctrine which declares that the *summum bonum* is to be obtained through knowledge. There is a third 'way,' the *Bhakti-mārga* (*q.v.*), which declares that love of, or devotion to, God leads to the highest goal. This doctrine was developed later than the 'way of works' and the 'way of knowledge,' but it became the most important one for practical religion, especially in more recent times.

The Hindus themselves have divided their religions into these three classes, according to the three 'ways' explained above; it is therefore necessary that we too should take cognizance of their classification, which, on the whole, well presents the facts and the historical development of religious thought in India.

II. *RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS.*—1. The first form of Brāhmanism, as already stated, is mainly a religion of ceremonies and observances; it is chiefly concerned with sacrifice, compared with which devotion and moral duties are of so little importance to the authors of the ritualistic books that they scarcely ever mention them. Of course, the religion of the priests belonged, strictly speaking, to that exclusive class only; it was not the religion of the people at large, or even that of the upper classes, though it was admitted by the latter, in theory at least (and is so generally down to recent times), to be the most sacred, the revealed religion. Its influence on the religious development in India should not be underrated; in order rightly to understand the latter, we must have a clear notion of the nature of the Vedic sacrifice. It is not offered to a god with the view of propitiating him or obtaining from him welfare on earth or bliss in heaven; these rewards are directly produced by the sacrifice itself, *i.e.* through the correct performance of complicated and interconnected ceremonies which constitute the sacrifice, and which are more of the nature of magic than of worship. Though in each sacrifice certain gods are invoked and receive offerings, the gods themselves are but instrumental in bringing about the sacrifice or in completing the course of mystical ceremonies composing it. Sacrifice is regarded as possessing a mystical potency, superior even to the gods, who, it is sometimes stated, attained to their Divine rank by means of sacrifice. In the *Brāhmaṇas* there are scattered many statements about this mystical potency—sacrifice in the abstract. The general notions contained in them have been combined by Martin Haug in a description of sacrifice which we shall transcribe from the introduction to his edition of the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (Bombay, 1863) p. 73 f.:

'The sacrifice is regarded as the means for obtaining power over this and the other world, over visible as well as invisible beings, animate as well as inanimate creatures. He who knows its proper application, and has it duly performed, is in fact looked upon as the real master of the world; for any desire he may entertain, if it be even the most ambitious, can be gratified; any object he has in view can be obtained by means of it. The *yajña* (sacrifice) taken as a whole is conceived to be a kind of machinery, in which every piece must tally with the other, or a sort of great chain, in which no link is allowed to be wanting; or a staircase, by which one may ascend to heaven; or as a personage, endowed with all the characteristics of a human body. It exists from eternity, and proceeded from the Supreme Being (Prajāpati or Brahmā) along with the *Traividyā*, i.e. the three-fold sacred science (the *Rik* verses, the *Sāmans*, or chants, and the *Yajus*, or sacrificial formulas). The creation of the world itself was even regarded as the fruit of a sacrifice performed by the Supreme Being. The *Yajña* exists as an invisible thing at all times; it is like the latent power of electricity in an electric machine, requiring only the operation of a suitable apparatus in order to be elicited. It is supposed to extend, when unrolled, from the *Āhavanīya*, or sacrificial fire, into which all oblations are thrown, to heaven, forming thus a bridge or ladder, by means of which the sacrificer can communicate with the world of gods and spirits, and even ascend when alive to their abodes. The term for beginning the sacrificial operations is "to spread the sacrifice"; this means that the invisible thing, representing the ideal sacrifice which was lying dormant, as it were, is set in motion, in consequence of which its several parts or limbs unfold themselves, and thus the whole becomes extended. This ideal sacrifice stands in the closest relationship with all the sacrificial implements, the sacrificial place, and all the sacred verses and words spoken during its actual performance. The sacrifice being often represented as a kind of being with a body like that of men, certain ceremonies form his head, others his neck, others his eyes, etc. The most important element in a sacrifice is that all its several parts should tally, and that consequently there should be nothing in excess, and nothing deficient in it. This harmony of the several parts of the sacrifice constitutes its *rūpa*, i.e. form. The proper form is obtained, when the *mantras* which are repeated are in strictest accordance with the ceremony for which they are repeated, or (if the sacrifice lasts for several or many days) when they have the characteristics of the respective days. If the form be vitiated, the whole sacrifice is lost. Mistakes being unavoidable on account of the extremely complicated ritual, the sacrificer was to be attended by a physician in the person of the Brahma priest. Each mistake must be made good by a *prāyaśchitta*, i.e. penance, or propitiatory offering.'

It is obvious that the dignity of the gods could not but be lowered in the opinion of those who had such exaggerated notions about the nature and importance of sacrifice. And, as a matter of fact, the gods descended from the high position they once had held in the esteem of the Vedic poets, and came to occupy quite a subordinate rank. The degradation of the once popular gods is a marked feature of later Brāhmanism, and we can trace its effect on the development of Indian religion in many important facts, as will be explained in the sequel.

The religion of the period of the Rigveda did not lack germs which, duly developed, would have raised the conception of the Deity to a higher level. Not only, during its last stage, had a Father-god, Prajāpati, become the object of speculation and adoration, but even before that time it had become a habit of the poet-priest to ascribe the attributes, functions, and powers of several gods to that particular one whom he was for the time invoking. This tendency to identify many gods with one has been called by Max Müller 'henotheism' or 'kathenotheism.' It is conceivable that henotheism might, in the end, have led to monotheism, or at least to a purer form of religion than the old Vedic polytheism. But in the *Brāhmaṇa* period the priests cared less to exalt the personal gods than to emphasize the momentous dignity of the impersonal sacrifice. The conception of the Deity as embodied in the Vedic gods was first debased by the ritualistic preoccupation of the priests; and the degradation of the gods was consummated by the superstition of the vulgar. But the same cause which diminished the dignity of the ancient gods gave rise to a new idea of God as Controller and Lord of man and the universe. The constant occupation of the priests with sacrifice and the symbolical interpretation of the meaning of the rites and ceremonies produced those ideas.